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Law Enforcement, Transportation Agencies join forces to better manage congestion resulting from major incidents on I-5

New report identifies opportunities and strategies to enhance regional incident response

SEATTLE, Wash., March 1, 2018 — As detailed in a new report released today from the University of Washington’s Mobility Innovation Center, Seattle-area law enforcement and transportation agencies are working together to jointly improve mobility in the wake of major traffic incidents in the I-5 corridor.

Last year alone, four extraordinary traffic incidents impacted the Seattle I-5 corridor, each taking more than 6 hours to clear. For every minute a highway lane is blocked, four to ten minutes of traffic congestion results, costing the region millions of dollars in lost economic value. These incidents also lead to secondary collisions, increased fuel consumption, and air pollution.

Sponsored by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), UW researchers undertook a study of how the region could improve response to major incidents. In collaboration with law enforcement and transportation agencies with jurisdiction in the Seattle area—WSDOT, SDOT, Seattle Fire Department, Seattle Police Department, Washington State Patrol, and King County Metro—researchers from the Center for Collaborative Systems for Security, Safety and Regional Resilience (CoSSaR) reviewed policies and procedures, studied past incidents, and conducted tabletop exercises to understand current and possible future responses to a major incident.

The core finding is that while incident response operations are well established and functioning efficiently, integrated multi-agency management of the resulting traffic congestion is also complex. Project participants identified potential enhancements that would employ innovative technologies to support this complex multi-agency effort, particularly addressing those that create impacts on the entire transportation network and require multi-jurisdictional response.

The six agencies have formally agreed to work together to implement the report’s recommendations. All have signed on to a charter establishing the Seattle area interagency working group which will define a regional framework for joint operations, information sharing, shared technology, and policies that enable an expanded response to major incidents.

Additionally, all six have agreed to engage in a follow-up Phase II project with the University of Washington that will design, test, and prototype system enhancements and solutions to maintain mobility during incidents. A key part of this work will be to engage additional private- and public-sector stakeholders. Solutions include:

- 1) *Enhanced System for Public Communication (ESPC)* - Engage the commuting public to understand how they currently obtain and use information about daily traffic and major incident-related congestion.
- 2) *Enhanced Information Sharing System (EISS)* - Coordinate interagency communication channels to expedite urgent information across the joint response network.
- 3) *Congestion Analysis Engine (CAE)* - Develop a centralized tool to provide real-time traffic status updates and offer preplanned reroutes to incident response teams.

"The report shows some of the many transportation-related challenges and opportunities the Seattle area faces as one of the fastest-growing regions in the country," said Roger Millar, Secretary of Transportation for the Washington State Department of Transportation. "It points the way forward for stakeholders both to expand on and continue with the innovative efforts that will make the Seattle area safer and more resilient for people, businesses, and the services they rely on."

"Highlighted in the report is the need for innovative solutions and expanded partnerships to meet the needs of our rapidly expanding region," said Goran Sparrman, SDOT Interim Director. "SDOT looks forward to continued collaboration with agency and industry partners to keep people moving safely and efficiently."

"The report recommendations make clear the need to formalize and empower an extended community that is ready to work together on all aspects of whatever is thrown at them," said Professor Mark Haselkorn, lead author of the report. "Moving forward, the Seattle area interagency working group will provide a critical addition to the fabric of our city's preparedness, resilience and ability to act as a coordinated community."

"Tackling our transportation problems requires the region's best innovative thinking - including how we view the problem and work together to approach solutions," said former Governor Chris Gregoire, CEO of Challenge Seattle. "Our region's transportation and law enforcement leaders have taken a crucial step to addressing the major traffic incidents that all too often cripple the region."

"Beyond Incident Response" is the third product to come from the Mobility Innovation Center which launched in March 2016.

About the Mobility Innovation Center A partnership between Challenge Seattle and the University of Washington, the Mobility Innovation Center tackles specific transportation challenges affecting the Puget Sound region, using applied research and experimentation. Housed at CoMotion, UW's collaborative innovation hub, the multi-disciplinary center brings together the region's leading expertise from the business, government, and academic sectors to use technology and innovation to find transportation solutions. Challenge Seattle is a CEO-led, private-sector initiative working to address issues that will determine the future of our region.

About the Center for Collaborative Systems for Security, Safety, and Regional Resilience (CoSSaR) CoSSaR is a joint venture between the University of Washington's Applied Physics Laboratory and the Human Centered Design and Engineering department. Its mission is to lead innovation in the design, development and use of collaborative systems that support regional operations for security, safety and resilience.

About TRAC

The Washington State Transportation Center (TRAC) is a cooperative, interdisciplinary transportation research center, linking the University of Washington, Washington State University, and the Washington State Department of Transportation. TRAC was formed in 1983 to coordinate transportation research efforts in the state and acts as a link among government agencies, university researchers, and the private sector.

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